

The fourth lesson: The basic approaches in media research

Do you believe that media studies require the approaches? How?

Text: Approaches in media

Functionalism on Media and Technology

It is difficult to conceive of any one theory or theoretical perspective that can explain the variety of ways in which people interact with technology and the media. Technology runs the gamut from the match you strike to light a candle all the way up to sophisticated nuclear power plants that might power the factory where that candle was made.

Media could refer to the television you watch, the ads wrapping the bus you take to work or school, or the magazines you flip through in a dentist's waiting room, not to mention all the forms of new media, including Instagram, Facebook, blogs, YouTube, and the like.

Because functionalism focuses on how media and technology contribute to the smooth functioning of society, a good place to begin understanding this perspective is to write a list of functions you perceive media and technology to perform. Your research might include the ability to find information on the Internet, television's entertainment value, or how advertising and product placement contribute to social norms.¹

Structuralism and the Media

If you want to understand culture and how the world works, you should analyse the structures which determine our experiences and behaviour. It is also important to look at the relationships and connections between the different structures to fully appreciate their influence on our lives.

For instance, you can break down Hollywood blockbusters into their codes and conventions to reveal the underlying ideologies which influenced their composition. You might want to see how newspapers can shape public opinion through their technical codes. Or identify the different tactics and appeals advertisers use so you can figure which ones are the most successful.

By analysing the connections between media texts, we can develop general conclusions about the wider cultural context. This approach to studying the world is called structuralism.²

¹ <https://shorturl.at/O7wea>

² <https://media-studies.com/structuralism/>

Symbolic Interactionism on Media

The symbolic interactionist perspective offers a nuanced understanding of media within the sociological realm. While many sociological theories focus on large-scale structures and institutions, symbolic interactionism emphasizes the micro-level interactions between individuals and how these shape their perceptions of reality.

This framework is particularly useful when analyzing the role of media because it highlights how media messages are not simply absorbed passively but interpreted and constructed in social interactions. The meanings people derive from media are shaped by their social contexts, experiences, and the symbols they share with others. This article explores the symbolic interactionist view of media, focusing on key concepts such as symbols, socialization, meaning-making, and identity formation.³

Critical Theory

In Media and Communications, Critical Theory stands as a pivotal framework. It allows us to dissect and further analyse the intricate relationship between media, society, power, and culture. The theory has roots in the works of influential scholars like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse from the Frankfurt School. Critical Theory provides us with a lens through which we can then unravel the hidden dynamics shaping our media landscape. This article provides a comprehensive overview of Critical Theory, its core concepts, and its significance in understanding the modern media environment.

Foundations of Critical Theory

At its foundation, Critical Theory is a philosophical approach that challenges the status quo. Thus, questioning prevailing norms, structures, and power dynamics. Emerging in the early 20th century, it sought to address the impact of mass media and culture on society. The Frankfurt School, a group of intellectuals based in Germany, played a pivotal role in developing this theory. Their seminal works, such as Adorno and Horkheimer's "Dialectic of Enlightenment," laid the groundwork for examining how media could simultaneously enlighten and manipulate the masses.

The Power of Ideology & Hegemony

Central to Critical Theory is the notion of ideology – the set of beliefs, values, and norms that shape our understanding of the world. Media, as a powerful disseminator of information, plays a significant role in then constructing and reinforcing these ideologies. Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony further enriches our understanding. Hegemony highlights how dominant groups maintain their control over society by subtly influencing public opinion through media narratives.

Media Representations & Cultural Studies

Critical Theory also places a magnifying glass on media representations, examining how they perpetuate stereotypes, biases, and unequal power dynamics. Cultural studies, a field closely aligned with Critical Theory, delves into the complex ways

³ <https://shorturl.at/vtyoB>

in which media constructs meaning and identity. Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model, for instance, emphasises how audiences actively interpret media messages. Audiences sometimes align with the intended meaning and at other times, resist it.⁴

Questions:

1. When it comes to media and technology, a functionalist would focus on:
 - a. the symbols created and reproduced by the media
 - b. the association of technology and technological skill with men
 - c. the way that various forms of media socialize users
 - d. the digital divide between the technological haves and have-nots
2. write another basic approaches in media.
3. which approach do you prefer to use it in your research? why?
4. Extract the main ideas of critical theory in media

⁴ <https://shorturl.at/EGsg8>